

## WORK-AT-HOME SCHEMES

In newspapers and magazines around the country and on the Internet you may see ads like this:

*Earn \$500 a week from the comfort of your home. No risk; guaranteed; no experience necessary. Just send S.A.S.E.*

Or

*Close to 2 million Americans make six figure incomes at home. Start a business at home that can make a six figure income.*

Offers like these may sound very attractive, particularly if you are unable to leave your home to work. But be cautious about work-at-home ads, especially ones that promise you large profits in a short period of time. While some work-at-home plans are legitimate, many are not. Home employment schemes are among the oldest kinds of classified advertising fraud. And now these schemes can be found on the Internet.

What many of these ads do not say is that you may have to work many hours without pay. There also may be hidden costs. Many work-at-home schemes require you to spend your own money to place ads in newspapers, make photocopies, or buy the envelopes, paper, stamps, and other supplies or equipment needed to do the job. The company also may demand that you pay a membership fee or make regular payments in order to get continued instructions or materials. Consumers fooled by these ads have lost thousands of dollars and have wasted their time and energy.

Stuffing and addressing envelopes is one of the most common work-at-home scheme. Promoters usually advertise that for a "small" fee, they will tell you how to earn money stuffing envelopes. For this fee, you might receive a list of companies that are interested in having you stuff envelopes. You must then contact each of the companies at your own expense and wait for a reply. Some companies may be non-existent or out of business. The companies that do respond often ask for more money or claim to never hire outside help. If the company is interested - and the chance of that is slim - you may end up paying for envelopes and postage. The promised, easy income rarely happens.

Assembly or craft work often requires you to invest hundreds of dollars in equipment or supplies or many hours of time to produce goods for a company that has promised to buy them. But no matter how high your quality work is, the company judges them to be inferior and returns the items to you. You are stuck with the goods; the company has your money.

On the Internet, crooks advertise in news groups or through e-mail offering low work, high paying jobs. For example, some crooks will sell graphics creation programs and claim consumers can make money by selling back completed graphics. Consumers who buy the programs soon find out the reality is quite different. Not only will the company not buy back the graphics, they won't give a refund either. The consumer has simply lost money.

If a work-at-home program is legitimate, its sponsor should readily tell you - in writing and for free - what is involved. Here are some questions you might ask a potential employer:

- What tasks will I be required to perform?
- Ask the program sponsor to list every step of the job.
- Will I be paid on salary or commission?
- Who will pay me?
- When will I get my first paycheck?
- What is the total cost of the work-at-home program, including supplies, equipment, and membership fees?
- What will I get for my money?

The answers to these questions may help you to detect whether a work-at-home scheme is legitimate and guard against the loss of your money and time.

Before investing money in a work-at-home venture, investigate the company's reputation by checking with the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division and the Better Business Bureau in the area where the company is located. These organizations can tell you if they have received any complaints about the work-at-home program that interests you.